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*Paper 2*

*SOUTH AFRICA'S STRATEGY OF DESTABILISATION IN  
SOUTHERN AFRICA: THE ZIMBABWE CASE*

*by*

*D Chimankire  
Zimbabwe Institute of Development Studies*

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### DISCUSSION PAPERS

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I. Apartheid and Militarism in Southern Africa: The Zimbabwe Experience

Apartheid in South Africa is internationally notorious as a system of national oppression, racial discrimination, and extreme repression.

Black people in South Africa are classified into three 'racial groups' - Africans, the so called Coloured (i.e. people of mixed racial descent) and Asians (predominantly of Indian origin). Although the particular forms of racial discrimination to which these groups are subject differ slightly, the racist system has for many years placed them all in conditions of brutal oppression. Black people in South Africa have no effective political rights and no freedom of movement. The official state policy denies that Africans are even South Africans. The State machinery is totally dominated by whites. Blacks may not own land in the 87% of the country deemed to be 'white South Africa'. They may not choose freely where to live, where to work, or where to send their children to school. On grounds of their 'race', blacks are denied access to a wide range of facilities and amenities available to whites. Taken together, all the oppressive measures of apartheid have produced a situation in which most of the wealth of South Africa is in the hands of four - and - a half million whites, while the overwhelming majority of the 25 million blacks in South Africa live in poverty.<sup>1</sup>

All this is known : it has been exhaustively catalogued in numerous publications, and we shall not dwell on it in this paper. Rather our concern is how to understand the development and operation of the racist apartheid system in the form of destabilisation in Zimbabwe and the measures Zimbabwe is prepared to take in order to do away with the Apartheid system in South Africa. The paper argues that without the

eradication of apartheid in South Africa there will be no peace in the Southern African region.

In the last few years South Africa's destabilization policy has received increasing attention and so there might be the impression that the apartheid state's destabilization policy is of recent veritage. In fact, the destabilization policy is at least ten years old, if one takes note of Pretoria's 1975/76 invasion of and debacle in Angola when it, together with the U.S.A., unsuccessfully tried to defeat MPLA and ensure a UNITA/FNLA government in Angola by the time of Angola's Independence in November 1975. Further, if one takes into account Pretoria's economic, political and military support of rebel Rhodesia, its illegal occupation of Namibia (in which South Africa's mandate was terminated by the U.N. General Assembly in 1966, where in South Africa's was proclaimed to be in illegal occupation by the U.N. Security Council in 1969, and the International Court of Justice declared, South Africa to be in illegal occupation of Namibia and confirmed the Security Council's 1969 call for its withdrawal), then clearly South Africa's regional destabilisation policy goes back to the mid-1960s. But it goes back even further in time if one takes a continental view of destabilisation, because of South Africa's military and economic support for the Tshombe secession in Katanga in 1961 which line of action continued with support for the Ila secession during 1967-70.<sup>2</sup>

## II. THE APARTHEID STATE IN THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN REGION: An Overview.

The interventions by the apartheid state in the Southern African region - in the form of military incursions, assassinations economic destabilisation, offers of economic 'co-operation' through a 'constellation of states', and proposed land cessions - are a large part of the daily news of this region.<sup>3</sup> Yet they should all be seen as particular tactics in a relatively coherent regional strategy developed under the Botha regime. In part, this should be understood as an aspect of the Total Strategy of the regime, and in part in the context of the history and specific dynamic of regional policy.

## III. CONDITIONS GIVING RISE TO THE TOTAL STRATEGY

From 1978 to 1984 South Africa's domestic and regional policies were consistently oriented around a coherent strategic vision of the conditions necessary to ensure the survival of apartheid. Known as the Total Strategy, this involved a complex mix of domestic "reform" and regional intervention. Clearly the Total Strategy was a direct response to four developments of the early 1970s:

- a) the reemergence, after nearly a decade of political quiescence, of the new forms of organised, large-scale black opposition. The bloody suppression of the 1976 Soweto uprising clearly indicated that the apartheid state could not continue in the old way and that some form of change was essential to its survival.
- b) The onset of a deep recession. All the leading business

people insisted that the easing of restrictions on the mobility and training of black labour, in order to permit its more productive employment in more highly capital-intensive forms of production, was essential to any economic recovery.

- c) The defeat of Portuguese colonialism and the independence of Angola and Mozambique under socialist governments, followed by the debacle of the first South African invasion of Angola in 1975-76, the humiliating withdrawal of the South African army, and the collapse of Pretoria's "detente" initiative, all showed the need for a new vision of South Africa's regional role.
- d) The growing international condemnation of South Africa and its isolation from its major allies - embodied in the U.S. vote for a mandatory arms embargo and demand for "one person, one vote" in 1977, together with the growing threat of sanctions - showed the need for a dramatic improvement in image.<sup>4</sup>

In 1977, the Department of Defence had argued that South Africa faced a "total onslaught". It advocated the mobilization of the full range of resources at the disposal of the state in order to preserve the "free enterprise system".<sup>5</sup> This was the Total Strategy, and it was a strategic shift away from the cruder forms of apartheid. It sought to restructure specific aspects of apartheid capitalism in order to preserve its basic parameters, to defuse developing mass unrest, and to reduce South Africa's international isolation. And the Total Strategy had both domestic and regional components.

The regional component of the Total Strategy rested on an attempt

to internationalize the problems confronting the apartheid state. Its strategists argued that the source of instability and conflict, both within South Africa and across the entire region, was neither apartheid nor colonialism but external intervention. Elaborate theories of a "total onslaught" against South Africa, orchestrated by the Soviet Union but sometimes including the Carter Administration and even the CIA, were proposed.

The fundamental objective of South African policy was now defined as the creation of a Constellation for Southern African states (CONSAS). Recognizing that apartheid was a barrier to formal alliances with neighbouring states, part of this tactic involved raising the specter of "Marxism" in order to generate a counter-strategy. Pretoria argued therefore that all the states in the region faced a common "Marxist" enemy, and that they could not rely on the Western powers for support. It proposed "regional solutions" to this allegedly "regional problem". By so doing, South Africa hoped that its international isolation could be eroded through a transformation of regional relations.

Over and above its primary objective of forging a "Constellation of States", the Total Strategy pursued five related regional objectives. In brief, these are:

1. Ensuring that neighbouring states would refrain from actively supporting the armed struggles led by SWAPO in Namibia and ANC in South Africa, and obliging them to act as virtual policing agents for South Africa by prohibiting political activity by South African and Namibian refugees in their

territory.

2. Ensuring that "Soviet-bloc powers" (including Cuba) would gain neither a political nor military foothold anywhere in the region. Pretoria objected even to any state establishing normal diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union.
3. Strengthening existing regional ties, as noted above.
4. Ensuring that "black states" in the region would not support calls for mandatory sanctions against South Africa and that they shield South Africa from such sanctions.
5. inducing moderation in the "heady anti-South African rhetoric" of the region.<sup>6</sup>

#### IV CONSAS COLLAPSES

The Botha's dream of Consas was naive, because it was built on two false assumptions: first that Muzorewa would win an election in Zimbabwe, and second that the majority - ruled neighbours shared the fear of a communist onslaught.

We should note here that Zimbabwe was the keystone to any regional grouping. The Frontline states (FLS) and the Botha's apartheid regime unveiled their plans in 1979 on the assumption that their side would win in Zimbabwe. The first shock to Pretoria was the massive ZANU-PF victory in Zimbabwe on 4 March 1980. On April Robert Mugabe took Zimbabwe into FLS and SAD C rather than CONSAS. The second shock was when all three other non-FLS members also joined SADCC. This meant that Apartheid was seen as more evil than Socialism.

Lesotho, although totally surrounded by South Africa, had been



moving steadily away from it politically; for example, in 1978, Lesotho hosted an UN anti-apartheid seminar and opened warm relations with Mozambique. Malawi, the only majority-ruled state in Africa to have diplomatic links with Pretoria, had sharply cut the number of migrant miners going to South Africa, reduced its purchases from South Africa (from 41 per cent of total imports in 1979 to 32 per cent in 1981), and was quietly building better links with its neighbours.

Swaziland too, was moving away; it gave tacit agreement for ANC guerrillas to pass from Mozambique through Swaziland to South Africa, and became more critical of apartheid. On 6 April 1981 it hosted a meeting of the heads of Mozambique, Botswana, and Lesotho which issued a communique denouncing 'attempts by south Africa to destabilize her neighbouring black-ruled states'.<sup>7</sup>

Thus none of the neighbouring states were willing to be seen consorting with apartheid and the bantustans, and all supported delinking. With its CONSAS plans undermined, the Apartheid regime appeared unsure of its immediate regional objectives, and during the second phase - from mid-1980 to the end of 1981 - it lashed out in a fairly indiscriminate way. Direct military action, and indirect aggression through puppet groups, was taken against Angola, Mozambique, Lesotho, and Zimbabwe. In Namibia, a "dual track" strategy sought to build the "internal settlement" under the DIA, while escalating military attacks against SWAPO bases in Angola in order to weaken it militarily and politically.

Compared with what was to follow, however, the destabilization measures taken up until end of 1981 were relatively mild. By early 1982 Pretoria seemed to have recovered from the "loss of Rhodesia" and had worked out its immediate regional objectives more precisely. South Africa now divided the states of the region into three broad categories and used a different mix of tactics against each. More conservative states, such as Swaziland and Malawi, were seen as real or potential collaborators and offered concessions in order to encourage them to deepen their ties with Pretoria, or as rewards for "good behaviour".

The second category of regional states identified by Pretoria were those considered unfriendly to South Africa but vulnerable to pressure, such as Lesotho and Zimbabwe; the third encompassed those whose political systems and development strategies were seen as a direct threat to Pretoria's interests, particularly Mozambique and Angola. Both groups were singled out for intensified and sustained military and economic destabilization.<sup>8</sup>

Limitations of space prohibit a discussion of the sustained and vicious assault on the countries of Southern Africa that has taken place from mid-1980 up to the present moment. We shall, therefore, confine ourselves to the Zimbabwe Experience, bearing in mind that economic, military and political methods most commonly used by South Africa against neighbouring states are normally grouped together under the heading of 'destabilization'.

Destabilization represents the "outward move" of the militarized state even while it continues to suppress and oppress the majority

of South Africans and indeed destabilization is the perfect linkage between the apartheid state's domestic and foreign policies.<sup>9</sup>

#### V. Zimbabwe Experience

At the centre of the region both politically and geographically, Zimbabwe was the biggest threat to South African hegemony. Robert Mugabe's joint policies of Socialism and reconciliation raised the threat of a prosperous multiracial state which would challenge South Africa's Apartheid policy. Zimbabwe is also critical to SADCC because it is literally the hub of regional transport and would be thus be central in re-directing traffic away from South Africa.

In order to prevent the Southern African States from becoming economically independent from South Africa, the apartheid regime used the following methods in brief to destabilize Zimbabwe and other Southern African black states:

- disinformation, (e.g. hundreds of letters and anti-government leaflets sent to Zimbabwe in 1983 and 1984)
- long-term invasion/occupation (e.g. Namibia since 1966 and Angola since 1975-76).
- attempted assassinations of Prime Ministers and senior government/ party members (e.g. 13 December 1981 bomb attack on ZANU HQ in Harare),
- assassinations/murders of liberation movement leaders and other personnel (e.g. Maseru, Harare, Maputo, Lusaka, Gaborone during 1981-1983),
- attacks on oil installations and routes (e.g. in Mozambique,

Angola, and Lesotho since 1980),

- attacks on military installations (e.g. Inkomo Barracks and Thornhill Air Base in Zimbabwe 16 August, 1981 and July 25, 1982 respectively),
- Training, supplying, directing surrogate armies in neighbouring states (e.g. UNITA in Angola, MNR in Mozambique, LLA in Lesotho and Super-ZAPU in Zimbabwe),
- attacks on transport routes (e.g. closures of the Benguela Railway in Angola, the Zimbabwe-Maputo line, the Malawi-Nacala line, the Malawi-Beira line, and attacks on the Zimbabwe-Beira road/rail line, during 1975-1980),
- port/border inspection of cargo, harassment of transport personnel (e.g. for Zimbabwe and Zambia 1986),
- limiting the use of South African railways, for example by manipulating the availability of railway wagons, (done to Zimbabwe, Botswana, Lesotho and Zambia).
- Restrictions on migrant labour, (done to Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Lesotho threatened).
- Border closures and restrictions, (done to all immediate neighbours: Lesotho, Swaziland, Zimbabwe, Botswana and Mozambique).
- Curbing imports from neighbouring states. (done to Zimbabwe, and Swaziland).
- Regulating the export of goods to black states, especially 'food and oil' (done to Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe).
- Restricting South African tourists (done to Lesotho and Swaziland).
- Violating the customs union agreement (done to all three

other members: Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland)<sup>10</sup>

VI. The following are details of selected incidents mentioned above:

- The first incident occurred on 3 August 1981. Joe Gqabi, representative of the ANC in Zimbabwe was assassinated outside his Harare house. The murder weapon was never found. Later it emerged that Gqabi had been targeted by the South Africans and eliminated by a squad sent into Zimbabwe to do the job.
- The next incident in the sequence occurred on 16 August 1981. A series of massive explosions ripped through the armoury at Inkomo Barracks near Harare destroying \$36 million worth of armaments. This was done by South African Agents.
- On 18 December 1981, a ten-to-fifteen kilogram bomb exploded on the roof of the ZANU PF headquarters at 88 Manica Road, Harare. This was aimed at the ZANU leadership.
- On 23rd July 1982, six tourists - two Americans, two Australians and two Britons were abducted by bandits on the road from Bulawayo to Victoria Falls. This was to undermine Zimbabwe's tourist industry.
- 25th July, a quarter of Zimbabwe's air force planes were sabotaged on the ground at the Thornhill base near Gweru in the centre of the country by South Africa.
- Intelligence analysis around 1982 defined the strategic intentions of the bandits in three phases. The first phase was to recover cached weapons not yet located by the government, and to train and arm recruits. Phase two was to attack isolated economic targets such as white commercial farms,

stores etc. Phase three was to attack police stations, army posts and security force patrols with the objective of making Matabeleland ungovernable. This had the support of South Africa.

Two other weapons, non-lethal but nevertheless destabilizing, which South Africa uses against Zimbabwe are propaganda and disinformation. Zimbabwean monitors first picked up a new station called Radio Truth on 15 March 1983, no long after the South Africans were known to have become involved with Super-Zanu. The new clandestine station broadcast initially in Ndebele and Shona at 7 AM and 7.30 PM daily. Reception was poor and a change of frequency in June brought with it the introduction of broadcasts in English at 6.30 AM and 7 PM. But reception remained poor. A further frequency change improved the quality of the reception of broadcasts in English but the reception in Ndebele and Shona remained of a poor quality - the transmitter was located near Johannesburg at the Meyerton Studios of SABC.

The South African campaign of disinformation against Zimbabwe has been affected in a number of ways, especially through unsolicited publications and circulars, a number of them mailed from Swiss Cottage in London, and attacks on individuals through anonymous letters. The earliest case of disinformation was detected soon after independence when publications were distributed claiming the formation of a new party, Super-Zanu, in which members of the existing Zanu leadership were said to be prominent.

- The disinformation campaign was stepped up in 1983 after the creation of Super-Zapu. Prominent politicians, diplomatic missions and individuals received a series of letters which purported to originate from a "Joe Moyo", said to be a member of the ZPRA high command.
- Fuel is another weapon South Africa has used to destabilize Zimbabwe. The rehabilitation of the Beira to Mutare oil pipeline, owned by the British transnational company Lonrho and closed during the UDI years, was a major post-independence priority. The reopening of the line was technically feasible by the end of 1981 but on 29 October the railway bridge over Pungwe river, which also carries the pipeline, was damaged in a sabotage attack and the road bridge was totally destroyed. In December 1982 Zimbabwe suffered an acute fuel shortage which almost brought the country to a standstill and resulted in queues at petrol stations that stretched for many kilometres.
- Much the cheapest route to the sea for Zimbabwe is through Chicualacuala, in the extreme south-east, to Maputo. This was subjected to continuous attack until the MNR closed it down completely on 20 August 1984. Thus, through its surrogates and through direct action, Pretoria forced Zimbabwe and other land-locked countries to return to almost total dependence on South Africa's trade routes. But Zimbabwe's response in committing troops to secure the Beira route obviously surprised Pretoria. And in the second half of 1985, faced with the prospect of the Chicualacuala route reopening by

by Mid-1986 if security improved along the line, South Africa introduced a new tactic. This was a two-tier tariff structure, offering lower contract rates than those published. The new contract rates undercut the previous Chicualacuala charges on four of Zimbabwe's main bulk exports - asbestos, tobacco, ferrochrome and steel. The message was obvious. Even if Chicualacuala was reopened it would be more costly to return to the traditional Mozambique routes than to use South Africa. Not only was this a way of further destabilizing Mozambique by denying it foreign currency earnings but it also exerted pressure on the Mugabe government.

- The vulnerability of Zimbabwe and other land-locked countries in the region was further demonstrated within a year of independence. First, South African Railways began to extend the turnaround time for railway wagons, claiming there was excessive demand for rail transport. Loading per day, particularly of diesel tankers, were reduced. Then, in April 1981, South Africa withdrew 25 locomotives loaned to the previous government of Rhodesia. It did this on so little notice that the Zimbabwe transport network was under severe strain for some time, forcing the loss of orders and stockpiling of maize, steel, sugar for several weeks. Lost export earnings were estimated at Z\$7 million a week.<sup>11</sup>

- South Africa's destabilization in the first six years of independence cost Zimbabwe millions of dollars in additional import and export tariffs, lost orders, property destroyed by bandits, discouraged investment and tourism. Beyond



that there was the cost of military operations against the bandits at home, the cost of guarding the Beira route and in July 1985, the deployment of fighting units in Mozambique for a joint offensive against the MNR.

### CONCLUSION

#### VII WHAT IS THE SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM?

More than six years after the independence of Zimbabwe and the founding of SADCC, the war for the control of Southern Africa has dramatically intensified. On military, political and economic fronts, Pretoria is asserting its claim to be a regional power. But also in replay SADCC is struggling to reduce its economic dependence on South Africa. So far the war is a costly draw. Pretoria has prevented the neighbours delinking and has forced them into economic decline, but it has failed to draw them back completely into the fold. Destabilization now costs the SADCC states more than \$4500 million per year.<sup>12</sup> These aggressive activities constitute a growing threat to peace which cannot be confined to this region or even this continent; it is an international problem. There should be a continuing effort to expose the irrationality and hypocrisy of Western financial and technical resources being used to shore up a regime which is engaged in destroying economies which these same countries are helping to develop. Today's wanton military aggression can be seen to underline two related factors:

- (a) That the South African regime has adopted state terrorism as a policy. That is bound to lead to a dangerous security

situation in the region, because the victims of such a policy will have to defend themselves.

- (b) In order to guarantee peace and security in the region, the international community should take immediate steps to isolate the South African regime by imposing comprehensive and mandatory economic sanctions.<sup>13</sup>

The demand for sanctions must be viewed in the context both of destabilization and Western support for the apartheid regime.

Those opposed to sanctions argue that they will hurt the neighbouring states. Undoubtedly this is true. But if it accelerated the downfall of apartheid, it would be well worth the additional cost. It is in this light that Zimbabwe would like to see "The Commonwealth Accord on Southern Africa" implemented which calls inter alia for the strictest enforcement of the mandatory arms embargo against South Africa, in accordance with United Nations Security Council Resolutions 418 and 558.<sup>14</sup>

Zimbabwe believes therefore that the imposition of comprehensive mandatory sanctions on the apartheid regime would enlarge the prospects of an orderly transition to social, economic and political justice in South Africa and peace and stability in the Southern Africa region as a whole.

ABBREVIATIONS

ANC	African National Congress (South Africa)
CONSAS	Constellation of Southern African States
FNLA	National Front for the Liberation of Angola
FLS	Front Line States
FRELIMO	Mozambique Liberation Front
MNR	Mozambique National Resistance
MPLA	People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola
PAC	Pan-African Congress
PF	Patriotic Front]
PF-ZAPU	Patriotic Front - Zimbabwe African People's Union
SABC	South African Broadcasting Corporation
SADCC	Southern African Development Coordination Conference
SADF	South African Defence Force
SWAPO	South West African People's Organisation (Namibia)
UANC	United African National Council (Zimbabwe)
UNITA	National Union for the Total Independence of Angola
ZANLA	Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army
ZANU-PF	Zimbabwean African National Union - Patriotic Front
ZPRA	Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army.

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